



Quarterly Report: January 1 to March 31, 2005

UZBEKISTAN: SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY ADVOCACY NGOS (04933)

**USAID Associate Cooperative Agreement No. 116-A-00-04-00008-00, under the
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Project Dates: August 27, 2004 to August 31, 2005

I. SUMMARY

The authoritarian nature of Uzbekistan's government, combined with the potential for extremist Islamic movements to grow, could create a volatile situation in the near future. In the run-up to parliamentary elections on December 26, 2004, the government barred independent political groups from participating and limited the ability of international organizations to conduct programming aimed at supporting democracy.

This quarter, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) anticipated initiating its one-year program aimed at enhancing the organizing skills of democracy advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs), encouraging cooperation among democracy advocacy NGOs, and establishing networks linking Uzbekistani civic activists to their counterparts in Turkey. However, because the government of Uzbekistan continued to restrict the activities of NGOs, the Institute again decided to delay its democracy advocacy training until there is more political space.

To date, NDI has identified a number of potential democracy advocacy NGOs to include in this program. Due to restrictions on the Institute's ability to move about freely, and to avoid the potential of harassment by government toward the leaders of advocacy NGOs, NDI decided to proceed slowly and cautiously. During this quarter, NDI conducted in-depth interviews with NGO leaders that will help it determine which organizations hold the greatest potential to develop advocacy campaigns aimed at monitoring parliament, advancing women in politics, and promoting political reform and transparency. The Institute plans to continue conducting these interviews during the next quarter.

As a result of this program, NDI expects that: (1) one or more democracy NGOs will have developed plans for and begun implementing an advocacy campaign; (2) two or more advocacy NGOs will have developed systematic procedures for sharing information or coordinating activities; and (3) Uzbekistani participants will have established networks with their counterparts in Turkey.

II. BACKGROUND

The consolidation of power under Uzbekistan's President Karimov has been more unyielding than in almost any other post-Soviet country. The state is highly centralized, the political arena is closed, and the media has for years been constrained by both state restrictions and self-censorship. The elusiveness of democratic reforms is in itself troubling. Additionally, a growing element of Uzbekistan's overwhelmingly Muslim population—faced with few channels for political participation, severe restrictions on religious expression, and a devastated economy—could begin to see extremist Islamic movements as acceptable avenues for protest. This combination is exceptionally volatile in a country of Uzbekistan's size and geographic significance.

There are hints that the government is not as monolithic as it appears at first glance. Alongside the hardliners, individuals who appear to be tentatively interested in democratic reforms are represented in various government agencies. Also, developments following September 11, 2001, provided a narrow but significant wedge into the Uzbek political system. In March 2002, the Uzbek government entered into a bilateral agreement with the United States, pledging, among other things, to improve democracy and human rights. This document offers U.S. democracy promoters a degree of leverage that was not previously available. For example, NDI and other international organizations were able to initiate democracy assistance programming. In 2003, opposition groups were allowed to hold national party conferences and other public events with minimal interference.

Recent events have not been promising. Following the parliamentary elections, a government shakeup resulted in a number of reformed-minded civil servants being removed from office. Because hardliners control the government, NDI is moving forward cautiously with this program as it might put its participants at risk of a crackdown by the government.

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

NDI's one-year program seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhance the organizing skills of democracy advocacy NGOs;
- Encourage cooperation among democracy advocacy NGOs; and
- Establish networks linking Uzbekistani civic activists to their counterparts in Turkey.

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

NDI did not begin programming under this grant in this quarter. NDI remained hesitant to launch a new project in a repressive political environment. However, through meetings and in-depth interviews, the Institute has identified a number of NGOs with the potential to participate in this program. In the next quarter, NDI will continue conducting in-depth interviews with the leaders of these NGOs to assess their suitability to participate in this program, and initiate, modest programming activities, including training and consultations.

V. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NDI will report its results in the next quarter.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Given the delays in initiating the proposed program, NDI plans to revise the provisional timeline for its activities as follows:

January - April 2005

- Assessment and identification of potential NGO partners

May - July

- Small training seminars on elements of advocacy campaigns
- Production of strategic plans for conducting advocacy campaigns
- Hands-on, step-by-step advising on implementing advocacy campaigns

August - September

- Study missions to Turkey

October

- Concluding seminar on lessons learned and best practices

Because NDI encountered more delays than it expected in starting this program, the Institute plans to seek a no-cost extension to complete its planned activities.